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Three Poems about Galileo

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THREE POEMS ABOUT GALILEO

Now this tickling is all in us, and not in
the feather, and if the animate and sensitive
body be removed, it is nothing more than a
mere name.

Galileo

1.

He puts the spiney feather
against the statue's kneecap
and slides it up the thigh
around toward the buttocks
and over the soft skin
made out of stone.

"The impassive flesh,"
our Galileo sighs—
"the flesh that's so exciting
unless *you're* made of stone;
the flesh that's so excited
unless *it's* made of stone;
the flesh, what is the flesh?
what is its corollary:
the golden sense of touch?"

He puts the spiney feather
up to his nose
and twirls the tip
inside his nostril. He puts

a flakey alka seltzer
on the statue's outstretched tongue
which doesn't salivate or tremble.
The tablet doesn't foam or bubble
like an alka seltzer should.

It sits there: white, immobile.

2.

“Remember,” says his inquisitioner,
“the feather didn’t tickle;
the alka seltzer
didn’t foam or bubble.

I didn’t see
the seven moons of Jupiter
revolve inside the tiny lens
of what you call your telescope.

I didn’t take
my golden opportunity
to flex my ancient knees
and shade my eyes from this room’s light.

I didn’t choose
to look into the chiarascuro future
which you had painted on the lens
of what you call your telescope.

It wasn’t as real as this room’s flesh.

(Though it was clever, I’ll admit,
to play with the illusion
of a world that proves your system . . .)”

3.

Then letting his unfinished thoughts
drop with a clatter from his crooked knees
the inquisitioner got up
and left the room
where Galileo was interred—the room
which he defined as “Galileo’s room, the room
where Galileo’s laws apply, the room
where Galileo will be endlessly detained”—

hoping to pull the wool of an idea
across the concrete world
while eyes as real as his looked on.